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FALL EDUCATION ISSUE

THE

Commonweal

Catholic Education—For What?

by William A. Osborne

Liturgy and the Layman

by John C. Cort

The Poetry of Wallace Stevens

by Marius Bewley

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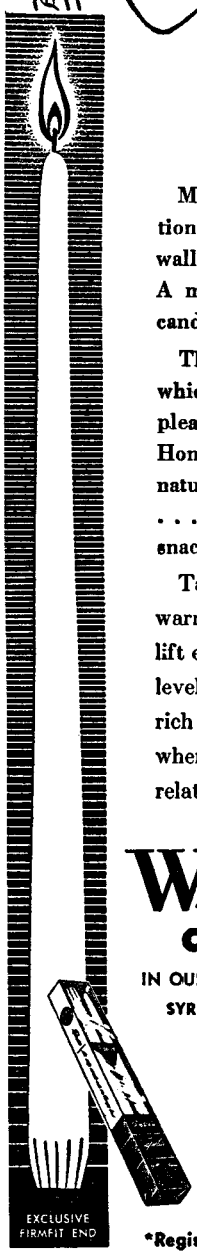

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The Commonweal

week by week

DEATH IN MISSISSIPPI

IN the summer, some U.S. children go to the mountains for vacations, and some get to the lakes or to the seashore. These are the fortunate ones—the kind of happy, healthy children one sees in the ads in the big magazines. Such children are hardly in the majority, however, even in prosperous 1955, and more American children undoubtedly stay at home and settle for the local park or playground.

Not fourteen-year-old Emmitt Louis Till, though, who had a vacation that was somewhere in the middle. He lived in the Negro district in Chicago, his mother's only son and, like the woman of Naim, she was a widow; her husband had been killed in World War II. The boy's mother could not send him to the mountains, nor to the seashore. But he did have an uncle who lived in Mississippi, and the boy could visit him for his vacation. His uncle is poor, and his home is a cabin, but to the boy from Chicago's streets, a vacation in Mississippi sounded fine.

His mother had certain worries about the idea. After it was all over, she told reporters that she had warned the boy to get down on his knees and beg forgiveness if he happened to offend a white man in Mississippi. Two or three Negroes had been killed there in recent months, one of them a local official of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the regional leaders of the Democratic Party have been meeting recently in secret to find ways and means of cutting down the already small number of Negro voters in Mississippi. The situation was somewhat tense. But the boy probably did not pay too much attention to his mother's warnings; life is not easy for a Negro in Chicago, but he still did not know what it means to have a black skin in Mississippi.

At any rate, the boy from Chicago went to Mississippi for his vacation, and while there he committed the unforgivable sin; he gave a "wolf-whistle" of admiration for a pretty young white woman. Coming from a fourteen-year-old white boy, this would have been dismissed as rudeness or lack of training at worst, and many would have laughed at the indication that the boy was on his way to becoming a man. For a Negro boy, though, things are different, and Emmitt Louis Till was marked for death.

What happened then is well known. That night white men came to his uncle's cabin and took the boy away. He was never seen again alive. Days later his body was found in the river, savagely battered, a bullet hole in the head, bound with barbed wire and weighted down—symbolically enough—with a cotton gin pulley. In Chicago a mother's world came to an end, and thousands of Negroes stood in line to see what a vacation in Mississippi had done to one of their sons. And all over the nation and the world people of every race and color read with shame and revulsion what had happened.

FACE to face with horror, what does one say? That the law should move speedily and honestly, that the guilty be found, that justice be done? Yes, this much, surely, and yet that cannot be the end of it.

We in the United States do not believe in collective guilt. The people of Mississippi are not guilty of this crime; the South is not guilty; the United States is not guilty. Two men, three men, however many were involved, they are the ones. They tortured this boy, they tore his flesh with barbed wire, they sent a bullet crashing through his brain and gave his body to the river. They are the guilty ones, and they should be brought before the law—even though one wonders what the law can do to them now that is worse than what they have already done to themselves. And yet which man among us does not feel uneasy at the thought of this fourteen-year-old Negro boy and his mother? How many of us can say firmly and without hesitation "Not Guilty"? Which one of us does not share in a larger guilt? For what happened in Mississippi is a cruel example of a

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moral disease that eats at our national vitals, saps our strength and makes hypocrites out of Americans.

Emmitt Louis Till died because of this disease. It is the same disease that created the Northern ghetto in which he lived, the Southern shack from which he was taken to his death. The same disease that put him in the river said he should live, work and die within the narrow confines of the Negro world. The boy from Chicago ended with a bullet in his brain, but the illness that ultimately killed him condemns Negroes to inferior homes, schools, and jobs, refuses them equality in death as in life. On this score the nation itself is sick, with an illness that in the North proclaims equality in word while denying it in deed and in the South denies it in both word and deed.

This is the illness, this the cancer. By his death Emmitt Louis Till took racism out of the textbooks and editorials and showed it to the world in its true dimensions. Now the ugliness is there for all the world to see. In the face of this, what can decent men do except redouble their efforts to cure ourselves of this evil thing? It is too late to help the Negro boy from Chicago who died so quickly in Mississippi; for others who die more slowly there is still time.

NO HOPE OF DISARMAMENT

WITHIN the past few days it has been publicly stated both by American and Soviet official representatives that there is no foolproof means by which inspectors in a country could detect the presence of concealed thermonuclear weapons. The dream of world disarmament observed and controlled by international inspection is thereby irreparably shattered. The only welcome element here is that it is better to be guided by the facts than to depend on outright illusions.

For one thing, our Secretary of the Air Force has now told the air attachés of other nations that the United States intends to retain an overwhelming preponderance of air-atomic power. Obviously the Soviet Union will strive to attain the same. The thermonuclear arms race goes ahead into a new stage of intensity.

What is left is the possibility of reaching an agreement on mutual surveillance of the potential concentrations of forces believed to be necessary for mounting a mass attack. In other words, both the Soviet Union and the United States will maintain and expand their means of visiting untold destruction upon each other but will seek to prevent recourse to such weapons by keeping tabs on each other's distribution of strategic forces.

Perhaps there is something practicable about such a "peace of mutual terror" at the moment. But as airfields multiply and the destructiveness of each bomb increases still further, how much of an observable concentration of planes and men will be needed to launch a mass attack? How could certain formations be distinguished from announced maneuvers?

When to this is added the future development of such weapons as guided missiles with atomic war-heads, the effectiveness of observing the disposition of means of delivery throughout the Soviet Union and the satellites would appear to be limited indeed. These horrendous possibilities must be considered in relationship to the time required to evacuate our large cities—the only possible tactic for civilian survival.

NEXT WEEK

MICHAEL P. FOGARTY writes about pluralism in labor unions.

"British and American practice differs sharply from that in Europe, and especially from that part of Europe where the Christian workers' movement is strong. The Christian movements of course agree that it is important for the workers in a given bargaining unit to speak with one voice. But the road to this does not, as they see it, lie through a majority decision conferring exclusive bargaining rights. It lies through collaboration between unions which continue to sail under their own flag, and through works councils or social security boards on which each "tendency" is represented in proportion to workers' votes."

MR. TRUMAN AGAIN

PRESIDENT Eisenhower remains enigmatic and Mr. Stevenson remains coy. In the meantime, 1956 draws near, and the voice of Mr. Truman is heard again in our land. As the nation has come to know, there is nothing enigmatic or coy about the Man from Missouri. Asked recently at a largely Republican luncheon if he "suffered remorse" over his 1951 dismissal of General MacArthur, the ex-President replied: "No, the only thing I regret is I didn't do it two years sooner." And in his Labor Day speech in Detroit, Mr. Truman characterized the present Administration as an errand-boy for Big Business.

Republican party spokesmen, of course, are terribly "shocked" by Mr. Truman's partisanship in

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defending his own record and attacking the record of his successor, and most of the nation's press has by now lectured Mr. Truman on the "lack of dignity" involved in any criticism of Mr. Eisenhower. There seems little chance that Harry S. Truman will take their lectures to heart. His voice will continue to be heard, as insistently partisan and unapologetic as ever, and pretty soon we may all be arguing about "Trumanism" again.

There is a danger here. If we start discussing Mr. Truman we may never get around to discussing what really matters now; we may find ourselves back in 1952, arguing again, on a less than lofty level, about deep-freezes and mink coats and that "mess in Washington" back in Harry Truman's day—and about how, honestly folks, we don't want to go back to that. What matters is the present and the future, not the past. What must be debated now is not Mr. Truman but Mr. Eisenhower, not what the Democrats did or did not do in Korea in 1951, but what each party proposes to do about the challenges we face in the perilous post-Geneva world.

For these reasons it would be regrettable if Harry S. Truman seizes too active an initiative in the coming campaign: this would almost certainly divert us from the issues at hand. And for these reasons it becomes increasingly necessary that those who intend to seek the 1956 Democratic nomination should begin to fight now. The President is not immune to criticism nor are the voters immune to the persuasions of reasoned debate, if only someone will make the effort. Great issues must be clarified, and the time to clarify them is now—in the accents, not of 1952, but of 1955.

WHERE INTEREST LIES

LATIN America is clearly one of the sectors of the globe in need of economic development. Besides, for twenty years the Good Neighbor policy has been cementing hemisphere relationships. At the same time private capital has continued to flow into the area from the United States. Today the other Americas account for some forty-three per cent of all our foreign investments. Such is the framework in which economic collaboration with Perón's Argentina has currently to be viewed.

Moreover, dictatorship is common in Latin America. Full-fledged political democracy tends to be the exception there. The effort to aid in raising living standards throughout the Americas would be hamstrung indeed if economic aid were restricted to genuine political democracies. Yet this is a thorny matter. It should be a source of intense national regret, for instance, that the government of the United States, and various big companies, have maintained such intimate relations with men like Gomez of Venezuela, who ruthlessly oppressed his own people for more than a quarter-century.

Hence there are plenty of precedents—and even plenty of reasons—for taking a leading part in the economic development of Perón's Argentina. Against such a course there are, however, even weightier reasons under present circumstances. A key point is that economic aid from the United States may actually be the means of keeping in office a regime which remains in power through sheer force—and one which is beginning once more to reassert itself by resort to increasing violence and repression.

The United States is currently involved in setting up Argentine steel and oil industries. In the first instance a sixty-million-dollar loan was quietly negotiated with the Export-Import Bank, which hitherto had turned down all applications for loans for enterprises not privately owned. Another hundred and eighty millions will be required to bring this project to completion. If this sum materializes in foreign parts, Argentina will at last have the domestic source of steel for weapons so long desired by her military men. It is said that Perón claims that only he can secure the necessary funds from the United States and bring the steelworks into being.

In the case of oil there is a curious state of tension. The Perón program of industrialization has accentuated the Argentine power shortage. The shrinkage of farm exports has made it impossible to pay for imports of oil. Economic pressure has combined with a nationalistic urge toward self-sufficiency to demand the establishment of an Argentine oil industry. But the answer has taken the form of an agreement with a proverbial symbol of Yankee imperialism, Standard Oil (in this case, of California). And the terms of the agreement are so favorable to the company as to be vehemently opposed by the government-operated oil-workers' union. Even the normally supine Argentine national legislature has had the enabling bill for over four months and has failed to report it out of committee, although the oil agreement will lapse unless ratified by September 30. Opposition to the oil deal is vehement and all but universal in Argentina.

People in dictatorships are used to official changes of front. (The oil controversy is a striking exception.) Here in the United States there is a latitude of choice. Why should this nation go out

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of its way to strengthen a dictator like Perón against the wishes of vast numbers of his people—especially when this also impairs our standing with other American peoples? Far better to accept the economic, political and other consequences of leaving such a dictator to work out his own problems, looking toward the day his compatriots can stomach him no longer.

ADENAUER IN MOSCOW

THE Geneva Conference's summer has come to a speedy close. Already the world has felt a chill as it realized how little real warmth was generated at the summit. After the optimism of his early reports, President Eisenhower has warned the nation against premature optimism, and, now that the vodka and the martinis are finished, we all think that the party was not really as wonderful as it seemed. We're not sorry we went, of course, but next time, we promise ourselves, we won't drink quite so much.

All this seems a healthy development. And if anything were sufficient to confirm our new sobriety it has been Dr. Konrad Adenauer's visit to Moscow. Here again were the smiles and the gestures of *bonhomie*—and here again was the lack of any real effort by the Kremlin leaders to give their show of good-feeling some substance to add reality to their promises of good will.

No one, of course, had expected the Communist rulers to take any real steps toward the reunification of Germany, but some had hoped that, as a concession to the good opinion of mankind, they would agree to release the German war-prisoners they still hold. Unless some last minute development changes the situation, however, it seems that the German Chancellor will leave Moscow with no greater satisfaction than having shaken Mr. Khrushchev's hand.

The Soviet leaders have told Dr. Adenauer that they wish to be "friends" with him, that they wish relations between their two countries to be "normalized." Perhaps this is so, but if it is, it is clearly so only on Moscow's own terms, which remain substantially what they were in the days when we called each other unpleasant names.

It is well that we have stopped calling each other unpleasant names, that we now talk less about doing foolish things. Perhaps we can thus manage to exist together until, in some distant future, a real accommodation is possible. In the meantime, Konrad Adenauer can easily prove to the world that smiling faces do not necessarily mean friendly hearts.

UPSETTING THE APPLECART

THE difficulties of travel on the Long Island Railroad have become legendary, but one morning recently something new was added. New York-bound commuters arriving at their local stations with the expectation, say, of boarding their regular 8:20 found that the 7:02 was just pulling in, and once on the train the harassed suburbanites soon learned that life on the LIRR had become unusually leisurely. The trainmen, it developed, were engaged in a war of nerves with management, and a slow-down was their way of serving notice that they were getting impatient. As a result, the L. I. trains that day poked along in a quietly tentative fashion, and what with one thing or another most of them managed to take twice the usual time for the trip into Manhattan.

On the labor relations aspect of this matter, we have absolutely nothing to say. Better men have ventured into the labyrinth of working rules which are at issue in the current LIRR dispute and have not been heard from since. But this magazine does have its own quota of commuters among the editors, and we are concerned about their behavior since their experience with the new, easy-does-it Long Island Railroad.

Normally, commuters tend to be a rather time-conscious lot. In our office, at least, they arrive on time, and in the late afternoon they are given to furtive looks at their wristwatches and subsequent quick disappearances, trailing behind them vague phrases about the 5:22 or the 6:04. This is all to the good, since, like all publications, this magazine exists only by virtue of sticking to a rigid time schedule. But now the slow-down on the Long Island has changed everything.

Trains that take twice as long as usual to arrive at their destination apparently encourage introspection, and the driving sense of urgency which is a normal ingredient of modern life seems to evaporate entirely. In a slow train the hopelessly missed 9:30 appointment seems not so important after all, and the editors involved even confessed to an almost overpowering urge not to come to the office at all. In short, whatever else it has done, the slow-down on the Long Island has played hob around here, and we imagine the same thing has happened in other offices in New York City. After all, how much time is there for the Long View of Things between 9:30AM and 5PM? When people start asking themselves, "Is this appointment or (in our case) editorial really necessary?" the whole system is tottering on the edge of disaster. The trainmen on the Long Island, we fear, may have started more than they bargained for.

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Catholic Education—For What?

"THE PROBLEM IS ONE OF DETERMINING HOW DEEP ARE THE SPIRITUAL ROOTS OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION"

WILLIAM A. OSBORNE

THE year 1956 will mark, in a sense, the seventieth birthday of the Catholic educational system in the United States. For it was at the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1886 that the American hierarchy made the decision which resulted in the elaborate network of schools and colleges we see today. True, Catholic schools can trace their origin back to 1809 when Elizabeth Bayley Seton, foundress of the Sisters of Charity, set up shop in Emmitsburg, Maryland. But it was not until the latter part of the century that certain developments and conditions on the broader American scene prompted the Bishops to push full-steam-ahead for a separate educational system.

It is unlikely that there would have been a demand for Catholic schools in this country had there not been a similar demand running throughout society. The same public attitude toward education fathered both the common-schools (as they were then called) and the parochial. As the nineteenth blended with the twentieth century, the conviction grew among Americans that formal education was something akin to a right of the young—this in marked contrast to the older notion that it was a concomitant of leisure or wealth.

While such public spirit sent all children from the age of six upwards romping off to school, Democracy and the Industrial Revolution were dictating the larger share of the curriculum and objectives. Business needed clerks, salesmen, managers; the factory wanted mechanics, technicians and office help; the ever-growing school system itself required teachers; and politics clamored for voters who could understand its issues. These were the demands which educators had to satisfy, and Catholics among them felt the same pressures.

The question of the difference between the two systems is best treated in historical context. The opinion which ultimately prevailed among the Bishops in the 1880's and '90's contended that young Catholics could not be relinquished to the common-schools without endangering their faith. The absence of Catholic influence among the teachers, or in the curricula, the strong Protestant atmosphere in some and the secular atmosphere in others, made these schools seem unacceptable. This, it might be noted, was a negative sort of conviction. But understandably so, for the Church had not developed a theory of education adaptable to a pluralistic society. The school they established was American, but with something added—Religion. A glance at the era gives weight to this point.

IN the 1880's immigration from the Catholic countries of Europe was beginning to resemble a tidal wave. The Catholic population of the United States, numerically insignificant before the Civil War, was mounting into a sizable minority, and, more important, a minority with a remarkable propensity for growth. As far as Protestant Americans were concerned, the newcomers differed not merely in religion, but to a great extent in language and culture. To them the Church looked like a sinister sort of foreign power, deeply involved in the political struggles and intrigues of a decadent Europe. Thus the loyalty of Catholics in America was suspect at best, and it became even more so when Catholics challenged the common-school. Perhaps the final straw was the obvious allegiance of many of the Catholic immigrants to corrupt political machines—the Tweed Ring in New York, the Gas Ring in Philadelphia, the Cameron Machine and others.

From all these causes there resulted a renewal of religious bigotry in the public press, the pulpits, and to some lesser extent in the halls of Congress. The American Protective Association was formed, and its members pledged themselves to vote against Catholic candidates for political office and to discriminate against them in employment. The APA expressed, in organized form, a widespread resentment against the increasing number and power of Catholics whom it regarded as un-American and un-democratic. In the United States Senate, Senator Blair denounced the Jesuits, saying: "Upon the staff of every great paper

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of this country today is a Jesuit, and the business of that man is to see that a blow is struck whenever there is an opportunity to strike at the common-school system of America." The anti-Catholic phobia current in this period did not, of course, result in the violence which occurred in the 1840's. Nevertheless, it did represent the climate in which the hierarchy had to face the problems of adjustment and education.

THE reaction of the American Bishops to all this was one of apology, in the better and literal sense of the word. They apparently felt that their differences with the supporters of the common-school had to be explained in patriotic terms; the loyalty of the immigrant had to be defended, and he, in turn, had to be Americanized. Cardinal Gibbons, for one, took upon his shoulders the tremendous task of making Catholicism and Catholics more palatable to the public. And because of the immigrant's previous loyalty, and his nostalgia for "the old country," it was equally important that he be assisted in making an adjustment.

Gibbons' first biographer, Allen Will, who knew him personally, saw these two points as ever-present objectives of his priestly life, dating from the time he was missionary Bishop of North Carolina in the early 1870's. Indeed, the "Age of Gibbons" may very well be described as an "Era of Apology." For not only was the Cardinal constantly emphasizing in his writings, public addresses and actions, the complementary nature of Americanism and Catholicism, but so too were other ranking prelates of the day: Archbishops Farley, Ireland, O'Connell, Dougherty, Mundelein and Hayes. The biographies of these men are marked in numerous places by public eulogies of the Constitution and American institutions, and much of their activity was given to appearances and speeches on patriotic occasions.

The problem here in the United States was a unique one in ecclesiastical history. It was the first experience of the Church in a pluralistic society where it had no roots or tradition upon which to build; where it was viewed as merely one of many religious, and even anti-religious, groups; where its members were not concentrated in homogeneous communities as in Europe, bus dispersed, even within the confines of the cities. Furthermore, the members themselves, although holding to a common Faith, often had little else in common. Language and cultural differences overshadowed their unity in the Mystical Body, and as each of the national groups moved up the social ladder and into "respectable" neighborhoods, the gaps between them became even wider—so much so that it was not uncommon for the Irish to prefer the marriage of their children into a "respectable" American family, though it might regrettably be Protestant, than into an Italian or Polish family.

In the data and statistics of the Official Catholic Directories of the era can be detected the extent of these differences among Catholics, for herein is evident the splintering of the Church. The 1912 edition of the Directory reveals, for example, 43 national churches (e.g. Polish, German, Italian, etc.) out of a total of 231 in Boston; 84 out of some 200 in Chicago; 40 out of 156 in New York; and 21 out of 102 in Philadelphia. Although in most cities the splintering did not progress any further, there were some where it did, notably Chicago, where over half of the churches were national by 1925. Sermons were delivered in the parishioner's native tongue by "one of his own;" so too with confession and anything else in which the vernacular was permissible. The rectory was often a source of news from home or of help when translators or go-betweens were needed; the parish societies, socials, and feast days all had the transplanted trappings and flavor of home. Like scaffolds in construction work, these churches may have been necessary; yet they did accentuate differences, beget a nationalistic competition for ecclesiastical office and prestige, and prolong the spirit of clannishness.

If one puts the whole picture into perspective—considering the external problem of adjustment to a Protestant-secular society, and the internal ones produced by immigration—it is obvious that this was a trying period in Church history, another chapter in the annals of "ghetto Catholicism." The fullness of Christian life could only be at ebbtide, as an uprooted people and their pastors faced what was largely a struggle to hold back destitution. In a harshly individualistic society like the U. S. of this period, the immigrant working man faced his employer alone, with his hands and his back his only bargaining points. Every slump of the business cycle laid him low, and then passed on, letting him rise again. His day ran into an exhausting ten hours, and his wife's was worse, for the family kept growing, the tenement flat got smaller, and the neighborhood generally was a slum or near-slum.

What could the Church do for such a burdened people? It suffered with them and for them. At Rome, Gibbons and Ireland defended their right to organize for a better life, and the effort of the Church to alleviate their lot in terms of charitable institutions and actions is a noble, if insufficiently recognized, story. Yet from 1880 through the 1920's the worker's efforts to earn even a bare livelihood absorbed so much time and energy that there could be little left for a fuller spiritual life. Knowing the difficulties involved in preaching to a hungry or harassed man, the Church largely strove to keep him in touch with the Sacraments and "on the straight and narrow path"

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of sinlessness. But for the children of the immigrants it could, and did, do more; it tried to shield them from the hard lot of their parents by erecting an educational system, as nearly equal to the public system as possible, and designed also to preserve their faith.

Here, then, may be seen the historical context and purposes of Catholic education. Obviously, such foundations, although humane, practical and perhaps the best possible under the circumstances, are negative or minimal. They illustrate that elasticity of the Church which has enabled it to survive trying times. But this ability to adapt, like an anaesthetic, can be fatal. "It is not for Her to accommodate Her message," warned Cardinal Suhard, "but for successive civilizations to assimilate it."

IN the realm of Catholic education, while there is evidence of a commendably ethical pattern of student behavior and an adherence to the Sacraments, there are equally disturbing indications of a Christianity that is shallow and of a lack of that spirit of detachment which partakes of the essence of spirituality and which is the antithesis of American life. The things which Catholic schools and colleges take for granted, the assumptions upon which they operate, offer a more valid insight into these deficiencies than do the eulogistic assertions in catalogues or commencement oratory. Among these assumptions is the virtue of scholastic achievements, for implicitly and explicitly our schools pay homage to scholarship. Then there is athletic prowess; in some quarters it ranks higher than in others, but numerous teachers and professors are often found in the sports parade along with their students. The school yearbook and paper, the proms with music by "name" bands and held in the luxurious settings of the better hotels—all such things speak volumes about Catholic education.

At the annual alumni reunions the "successful man," the man of prestige, receives the honors and the eulogies. The Public Relations and Alumni Offices, in trying to keep tabs on the competition of the Catholic with the graduates of the Ivy League, seek answers to such questions as: "Your annual income?" "What honors in your profession have you received since graduation?" "What degrees do you now hold?" "Do you own your own home?" "What positions of leadership do you hold?" Although the questions are not so common as ten or twenty years ago, many yearbooks still ask the seniors, "Who is the most popular member of your class?" "Who is the most likely to succeed?" A college instructor who recently queried his students on their reading habits found that *Life, Time, The New Yorker,* Hemingway, Greene and Waugh received most frequent mention; The Commonweal or *America* was read with regularity by a fourth of the class. But none had read through the New Testament; only one-fifth had read a life of Christ or of any of the saints.

It is true, of course, that none of these activities, objectives or omissions are evil; and certainly they are typical of our national life. But stating this misses the point, for the problem is one of determining how deep are the spiritual roots of Catholic education. If it is the scholar, the athlete, the man of prestige whom teachers, professors and college presidents esteem—and on whom they confer their institutions' awards and praises—then it is almost inevitable that these are often the idols of our youth, these the men they emulate. It is then simply a matter of facing reality to assert that there is no harmony between such tacit ideals and that interior transformation, that metanoia, which is the "losing of one's life" in order to find it, that immolation of self in order to be one with Christ. In India, just to indicate what the young are capable of, it is common to hear a Hindu youth assert his ambition to be a holy man; mysticism is a high national ideal. In the United States a youth with ambitions for holiness is regarded as a candidate for the convent or seminary. Does this not imply that the basic message, "This is the Will of God, your sanctification," is not even understood?

Perhaps the most tragic aspect of our deficiencies lies in the lack of an awareness of the depths, the almost exasperating depths, of Christianity. All too often, teachers of Religion seem reluctant to admit the inadequacy of their courses, probably because they feel it would be a reflection on themselves or on the particular school. What they do not realize is that the problem is something beyond their immediate control, that religious instruction is bound to suffer when it must share the curriculum with a host of more pressing and practical mundane courses, and when it must compete for student interest.

WHATEVER the remedy, the failing must be admitted first. And it should be self-evident when the notion is so common that the courses in Religion and Philosophy constitute the dimensions of Catholicism, and that its practice lies merely in external observances and a moral life.

One of the traditions of Western Civilization of which the United States is an heir is a kind of "intellectualism" which divorces man's reason from his other spiritual faculties. This, in turn, has provoked Catholicism into making a counter-attack on a too exclusively rational level.

It was in response to this challenge that Catholic educators canonized their own species of rationalism, congested the extensive and difficult erudition of St.

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Thomas Aquinas into a distorted textbook simplicity and distributed it liberally among their schools of higher learning. Today it is not at all uncommon, for a Catholic college student to complete his course without reading the New Testament or a life of Christ; but it is impossible for him to do so without two or three years of Scholastic Philosophy. Nor is it an exaggeration to say that he knows more about what is wrong with Hegel, Marx or Dewey, than what is so relevant for him in a St. Francis, a Catherine of Siena, or a Bernard of Clairvaux.

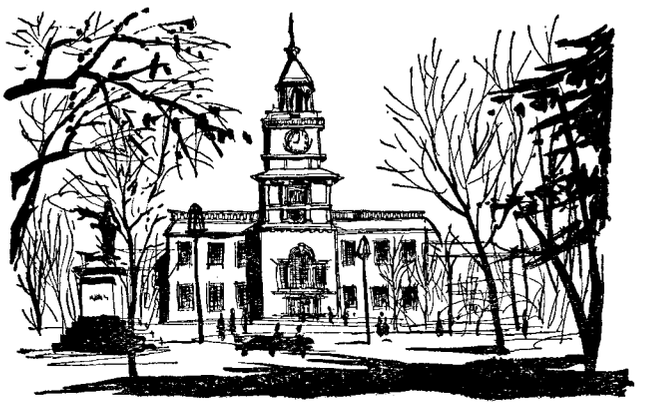
The emphasis in the Catholic college is on the rationale for the Faith, and on an intellectual counter-attack on its enemies. Human nature being what it is, this emphasis evokes sympathy or understanding when one recalls the setback suffered by the Church from the Reformation and the consequent necessity to justify its claims before men on the same intellectual grounds which were fashionable in the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But what can be the justification for intellectualism in Catholic institutions today, institutions whose spiritual emphasis should be mystical and ascetic? To make the approach to Christianity intellectual seems to render it defensive and sterile. It represents a lagging behind in the responsibility to leaven the loaf of American society.

The emphasis on Philosophy and the rationalistic approach to the courses in Religion appear to have had serious results indeed. It has led the student to by-pass an awareness of the more fertile powers of man's spirit, so that he seems utterly incapable of comprehending the vital Christian tradition of asceticism. It has aroused in him a passion for logic which overshadows his compassion and enables him to rationalize his way around contemporary endeavors based on love.

To illustrate: the average student can dismiss the Catholic Worker movement, without its even touching his heart, by attacking its condemnation of war and Capitalism, but he cannot grasp its message on poverty, and he finds it difficult to stomach its love for society's outcasts and derelicts. His whole concept of charity seems to be just that—a concept. It lies as a veneer on his Faith, petrified by conformism and satisfied with support of charitable institutions, philanthropy and almsgiving (generous support, it must be added). This at a time when the world's most renowned atheist, Sir Bertrand Russell, has conceded that there remains but one thing for woeful man to try—Love; in an age which has seen a noble soul, Gandhi, conquer the British Empire by passive resistance; and at a time when the compassion of an Abbé Pierre starts the French people enroute to a solution of their terrible housing problem.

It would appear that we have allowed the intellectual satisfaction generated by the truth of Scholastic Philosophy and Christian Apologetics to anaesthetize the student into the view that the ills of the world are simply due to opposing philosophies, defective reasoning, Communists and secularists. It is a satisfaction which innoculates against any feeling of spiritual deficiency, or any yearning to discover the Kingdom of God within one's soul, and it carries over into the field of action, producing a conservatism, a resistance to any change in the routine of religious practice which today is the major obstacle to the liturgical movement. The over-all effect, as Karl Adam has observed, is an "atrophy which infects the spiritual attitude of so many Catholics. Their faith often is reduced to a purely intellectual and therefore shallow awareness of the teaching of the Church and to a mere assent of the mind, pronounced as easily as our mind assents to the things of this world."

"The one and only tragedy," Leon Bloy once wrote, "is not to be a saint." And the late Cardinal Suhard



said: "I must be a saint in order to be a good Archbishop." Catholic educators have but to ask themselves if they are leaving Catholic youth with the impression that sainthood is the reward for the good suburban life. Somehow the impression is conveyed that "life is just a bowl of cherries," with Christianity as the rulebook. If you stick by the rules, you can get the most out of life and save your soul too.

The task of the Catholic educator then, is to reverse the impression, to teach that "Life is a measure to be filled"—filled to overflowing with love. To the extent that it is, then we are saints. The task remains of making Catholic education essentially a religious education somewhere along the line, either in the parish, in the schools, the Sunday schools, or in all of them—"religious," as Christopher Dawson defines it, in the way that the first Christian education "was conceived not so much as learning a lesson but as an introduction into a new life, or still more as an initiation into a mystery . . . the unveiling of spiritual realities of which the natural man was unaware and which changed the meaning of existence."

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Liturgy and The Layman

THE story is that Cardinal Gasquet once asked one of his priests, "What is the position of the layman in Catholic life?"

The priest replied, "The layman has two positions: kneeling at Mass and sitting while the priest is in the pulpit." Upon hearing this the Cardinal is supposed to have commented, "To which you can add a third position: hand in pocket."

This little story was told by Father Dennis Geaney, at the Sixteenth National Liturgical Week in Worcester last month. It was typical of what seems to me a very healthy and encouraging preoccupation on the part of the liturgists with the mind and manners of the Catholic layman.

To explore this strange world the conference devoted two days, roughly half of its time, to talks on "The Liturgy and the Social Order." The other two days were spent in discussions and demonstrations of the new American Ritual, which permits the use of English for the first time in the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Matrimony and Extreme Unction. And here again, in the fact that we have such a ritual to discuss, lies further evidence that we may be entering a period when the layman will assume still another position, that of full participation in the rites of his Church.

Since the days of Father Vergil Michel, the liturgical movement in America has never been marked by that complete absorption with the sanctuary that marred the movement in other countries. At Worcester, Monsignor George Higgins reminded his audience, for example, that "the Nazis, far from being worried about the pre-war growth of the liturgical movement in Germany, secretly encouraged it." They did this because "they felt that an intense preoccupation with the liturgy would serve to distract the attention of Catholics and make them less inclined to engage in political action." By contrast, Monsignor Higgins made the point that "in this country at least a large number of Catholic social actionists have been active liturgists and vice versa." Actually, it has been my impression that the liturgists have been more aware of the need for social action than the social actionists have been of the need for what you might call liturgical action.

"The liturgy is not a substitute," the Monsignor warned, "for the art of politics, which is made up in varying degrees of common sense, practical experience, an intimate knowledge of past and present facts, and at least a working knowledge of the principles of political science and political ethics."

Monsignor Higgins' talk was larded like a plum-cake with quotations from Maritain, Suhard, De Lubac, and the like. One of the best was this from Maritain:

"It is not enough for a population or a section of the population to have Christian faith and be docile to the ministers of religion in order to be in a position properly to judge political matters. If this population has no political experience, no taste for seeing clearly for itself, nor a tradition of initiative and critical judgment, its position with respect to politics grows more complicated, for nothing is easier for political counterfeiters than to exploit good principles for purposes of deception, and nothing is easier for human weakness than to merge religion with prejudices of race, family or class, collective hatreds, passions of clan, and political phantoms which compensate for the rigors of individual discipline in a pious but insufficiently purified soul."

Having said all this, and added from his own perception one of the more memorable observations of the day, "A Missal is no substitute for Robert's *Rules of Order* during a parliamentary debate, nor is a well-trained *schola cantorum* a substitute for a well-trained political caucus," the Monsignor launched into the major theme of his talk, namely, that "it is still the Mass that matters most, even in the political order."

His demonstration of this essential fact was not as clinching as the foregoing companion piece, but this is no reflection on him. Rather it is, I think, a difficulty that flows from the nature of the subject. For if it were easily apparent that the Mass matters most in the social order, then men would have no choice but to accept the Mass, and this would scarcely be in keeping with God's gift of free will.

Once again Monsignor Higgins borrowed from Maritain for his most effective proof, which is something of a tribute to the greatness of the Frenchman:

"Right political experience cannot develop in people unless passions and reason are oriented by a solid basis of collective virtues, by faith and honor and thirst for justice. . . . Without the evangelical instinct and the spiritual potential of a living Christianity, political judgment and political experience are ill protected against the illusions of selfishness and fear; without courage, compassion for mankind, and the spirit of sacrifice the ever-thwarted advance toward an historical ideal of generosity and fraternity is not conceivable."

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OF all the talks, though, I think I liked best the one by Chicago's Ed Marciniak, editor of the excellent Catholic labor paper, *Work,* and not merely because he was the only layman on the program, at least at the general sessions. His subject was "The Mass and Economic Order" and here are a few quotes:

"During the centuries which saw the rise of modern capitalism in the Western world, the Christian layman was left behind in the corporate action of the liturgy. Should anyone then be surprised to find the layman leaving the Mass behind him upon entering his neighborhood, office, factory, playground or legislature?. . .

"The layman's role in economic reform has generally been created in the image and likeness of the priest's. . . . The priest's influence is limited to writing, teaching, counseling, publishing a paper, running a labor school, and giving inspiration. But economic reform is action from within one's occupation or by the government from without. Setting economic policy or changing economic institutions is pre-eminently the work of the layman.

"A concept of economic reconstruction, tailored to suit the priest's role, tends to cut down the importance of the layman's specific job within his own occupation. It is the layman who must devote himself to the often tedious task of developing habits, policies, laws and institutions which reflect the Christian spirit."

Fortunately, recent statements by Cardinal Stritch, Archbishop O'Brien, Bishop Dwyer and others indicate that the Church in America has come to appreciate the implications of the fact that, as Archbishop O'Brien put it, "it is only the layman, and not the priest, who can bring the social teachings of the Church into his home, into his union, into his factory, into the political arena."

This awareness of the layman's role was evident throughout the liturgical conference. A few more quotes:

Monsignor Reynold Hillenbrand, in discussing "The Mass as the Source and Center of the Lay Apostolate": "The most important job in the next twenty years is to find priests who are humble enough and patient enough to work with small groups of laymen on every level of American life."

Bishop Vincent Waters, in speaking of "The Mass and Interracial Justice" and giving the definitive answer to the old question, "Would you want your sister to marry a Negro?": "God and the Church have put that decision in the wills of the man and woman. No one but God can bring them together and no one but God can separate them."

Bishop John Wright, host to the conference, whose enthusiastic hospitality made a big hit with visiting delegates, in his talk on "The Mass and International Order": "The Holy Father has said that there is no other group of human beings so favorably disposed, in breadth and depth, for international understanding as Catholics should be. He has said that they, above all, must realize that they are called upon to overcome every vestige of nationalistic narrowness and to seek a genuine fraternal encounter of nation with nation." And it was good to hear the Bishop's dig at "those Catholic papers that have omitted such sections of Pius XII's remarks as seemed too progressive."

It was good, finally, to be able to attend the evening Masses in the Worcester auditorium, where the laity were given a chance to participate in spoken responses in English, the layman's language, in beautiful hymns and chants with substance and some virility to them. Here, with the celebrant facing across the altar toward him, a layman truly felt that he was part of the Sacrifice, that he really belonged.

JOHN C. CORT.

THE FLOWERING

IN the reverent wind, in the religious sun,
baptist of the seed's fine miracle,
all summer long, all summer mild,
the flower below the tip of the sky, spun
in the root of His touch, canticle
of flowering, fairly as wild,

shines in the wind's reverence, in the sun's power,
white as a sun in my shadow of bending
over it. My eyes blink at the gloss
of innocence in this gentlest flower
surely blooming like never-ending
Heaven to my heart on its cross.

Silk scent hums in sweet rivers of sense
from the air it leafs foliate with,
as pollen, gold treasury, sprinkles rich kind
to many a million fields of summer, thence
from the secret stored Eden, truer than myth
marvels the thin shadows of my mind.

The shine of its growing in the soil
celebrates the wind's worship, the sun's prayer,
fulfilled to hope which creation celebrates;
and I see the expectation of my toil,
in this pure flower, for heavenlier air,
toward the first Garden from the lost Garden's gates.

JOHN FANDEL.

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THE STAGE

COCTEAU

"THE Typewriter," the second production in Miss Julie Bovasso's repertoire at the Tempo Playhouse, marks a recession from those plays of complex and enigmatic presence—notably, as in "The Infernal Machine," versions of myth—with which Jean Cocteau has sought to create a contemporary poetry of the theatre. This is a work in the Ibsen manner, flinty and harsh, tightly-coiled: from its opening string of imprecations to the pistol shot with which it tritely ends, drawing (in Cocteau's words) "a picture of the terrible humbug of the provinces before the crash." To the moral and psychological insights of his *drame bourgeois*, the playwright has sacrificed all the conventional charm of minor beauty and spectacle; throughout, the work is confined to what Mr. Francis Fergusson (in discussing Cocteau's theatre) calls "the little scene of human reasoned purpose." No light—or at most an oblique one—is thrown into "the wider scene of surrounding darkness . . . . the plot behind the intelligible intrigue."

Yet this jungle of lucid surfaces and immediate horizons is intended, too, to have its concealed beasts. "The problem of the theatre," Cocteau observes in a prefatory note, "consists in creating a misunderstanding: that is, doing what one wants to do, yet at the same time moving that mysterious mass (i.e. the public). I am trying to find a balance between the stage and the audience. To write obvious plays with subtlety and with great parts for great actresses." The element of the "obvious" in "The Typewriter"—its intelligible intrigue (ostensibly borrowed from melodrama) in which a police inspector seeks to determine the circulator of anonymous letters in a provincial town—is exploited by Cocteau with ingenious dexterity and poise: the play's first two acts build superbly to their *coups de théâtre*. The "subtlety" of Cocteau's dramatic formula is a massive cocoon of artifice, woven by all the play's personages. Everyone in "The Typewriter" is engaged in imposture: through indolence or vanity or worse, they secrete each about their naked and impoverished selves the filament of deceit. The play, then, like much drama, is a study in the unmasking of *essential* personality, and with that intention, it employs all the Gallic conventions (which is to say specifically dramatic conventions) of theatrical artifice. (We may consider in passing how large in French drama loom fraud and imposture, the illusions of appearance, deceitful assumptions of personality.)

What "The Typewriter" cannot quite sustain, however, is precisely this vast and intimidating structure of psychological complexity. Boldness and subtlety there are in Cocteau's arrangement of the situation, yet his "little scene of human reasoned purpose" will not permit much expansion: the realistic drama has limits which only its supreme masters can dissolve. The "wider scene of surrounding darkness" which Cocteau ostensibly seeks to suggest is doubtless to be found in his major female role, a study of mature passion ("great parts for great actresses") yet the explicit invocation of Phedre and Isolde, of the Princess of Cleves and Emma Bovary, is merely pious: it is not visibly realized in the text. The role seems to demand some infusion of personal sentiment; Mme. Gabrielle Dorziat, who created it for the 1941 Paris production, no doubt brought to it her mesmeric intensity of art. At the Tempo Playhouse, Miss Katharine Sergava plays the role with correct continental taste which wilfully refuses any elevation to power.

Mr. Strowan Robertson's direction of "The Typewriter" is finished and secure; so is the general quality of performing. Again, the vital center of the production is Miss Bovasso's dominating personal vision. Miss Bovasso seems to me an actress of permanent interest. Without facile beauty or obvious charm, raw and strident as her playing sometimes is, she has still that bright particular thing we must treasure in dramatic art: the instinctive theatrical sensibility. Nothing she touches remains passive or inert. She has that power to act out her private phantasies—to transform them into the substance of vision—which is the impulse of the artist. One is curious to see what she might do with the great roles of the modern repertoire: her ravening inwardness should make her, in time, a supreme Hedda Gabler, while her present magnetism and attack splendidly equip her for the dark violence of the daughter in Pirandello's "Six Characters." (*At the Tempo Playhouse, 4 St. Mark's Place.*)

RICHARD HAYES.

THE SCREEN

WHAT, NO HEMINGWAY!

AT the beginning and the end of "The African Lion," the latest entry in Walt Disney's feature-length True-Life Adventures, the camera concentrates on Mount Kilimanjaro which dominates the plateau country where most of this film was made. The snow-covered mountain must look pretty much now as it has through the centuries; the animals examined more closely by the camera are behaving pretty much as they always must have.

Although lions are the main subject of wildlife photographers Alfred and Elma Milotte, who spent three years getting these fine pictures, their cameras by

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no means neglect the other animals. There are plenty of shots of ridiculous giraffes in action and agile antelopes, of leopards tracking down their prey and the vicious and unpredictable rhinoceros charging.

Although "The African Lion" contains nothing to compare with those wonderful sequences on the prairie dogs in "The Vanishing Prairie" this item in the True-Life Adventure Series, like the others, is filled with information without creating the impression that you are being lectured at. The visuals are the main thing—whether it's those lovely shots of crocodiles, hippos and fish cavorting under water, or the disturbing scene of a rhino caught in a mudhole while a baboon contemplates his problem, or those terrifying sequences of swarming locusts. The well-written narration that accompanies all the pictures never gets in the way. Furthermore, although nature's plan may seem rather cruel, there are no people to clutter up the survival of the fittest as it is acted out in this movie on Africa.

THE same cannot be said of two other feature films now on our screens. "The Night Holds Terror" is actually an exercise in terror. Using a theme that seems to fascinate both movie-makers and stage producers these days, this chilling little movie is about a father and a mother (Jack Kelly, Hildy Parks) who are held at bay by three killers. Producer-writer-director Andrew Stone has made a film that is so real and so hard to watch that you can hardly take it in spite of all its good movie making. Its suspense and brutality are unrelieved. Even more spellbinding than the spectacle of the mother, father and their two little children being put through agony are the remarkable scenes in which the police swing into action and the kidnapers' telephone calls are traced. Never before have machines incited so much suspense.

IN somewhat the same category is "The Naked Dawn," which tries to get philosophical in its discussion of man's cruelty to man. Its story concerns a hold-up man (Arthur Kennedy) who takes refuge with a young married couple (Eugene Iglesias and Betta St. John) who don't particularly love each other. The triangle keeps reshaping itself into various two-somes, but finally ends as it probably should. I'm not sure exactly what the makers of this film had in mind, but they certainly act awfully arty and try very hard to give the impression that their pretentious fable has some important statements to make about the basic dignity of man. Perhaps the clue to this gem is in Betta St. John's profound observation about her husband: "Little pigs grow into big pigs."

PHILIP T. HARTUNG.

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COMMUNICATIONS

HELL'S CANYON

New York, N. Y.

TO the Editors: You speak (with truth) of "the fuss Hell's Canyon will cause in the Northwest." Why not, everywhere? The answer to that, I think, is not merely that the issue has greater immediacy for this region but that its newspapers are giving full publicity to it, whereas elsewhere there is a deliberate campaign to misrepresent the issue on the part of the one-party press. How many are aware that if the Idaho Power Company three-dam development scheme is not killed in Congress we shall lose for all time to come 45 per cent of the power potential of this last of our great natural power sites? From now until doomsday, that is to say, we shall lose by this scheme enough power yearly to care for all the light and power needs of a city the size of Indianapolis. Can we afford to toss away all this rich bounty of nature, write it off forever? Obviously we cannot. The policy of conservation defended so valiantly once by such really great Republicans as Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot has fallen on evil days under the unholy alliance of Eisenhower and big business. It is an issue, however, which concerns every American.

G. R. GARRETT.

GARCIA LORCA

Lans, Tyrol, Austria.

TO the Editors: Reading Mr. Anthony Aratari's essay on the "Tragedies of Garcia Lorca" (August 12, 1955) I was not too happy to see the psychological and political deductions Mr. Aratari drew from Garcia's plays. This author, after all, was too much of a misogynist to be used as Ariadne's thread in the Spanish Labyrinth, and if I am right, I perceive an implication that, in Spain, the family, the Church and the State are forming an authoritarian triangle . . . an old myth without foundation which George Ticknor, startled about Spain's anarchical freedom, 140 years ago, would have rejected outright. I grant that the family ties in Spain are very strong, but where can we get a truly powerful Church in an autocratic State? And autocracy is something quite different from authority. And, finally, are the nations responsible for their clergy or is it the other way 'round? We Continentals do not call our secular priests "Father." We see in them the *sons* of our people.

Yet leaving Garcia (rather than Lorca, which is merely his matronymic), whose murder (by the *Guardia Civil* rather than by the Falange) is still

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a mystery and whose plays are most popular in Spain, I would like to put in a mild protest against the term "Catholicism" profusely used in Commonweal editorials and articles. This term actually has no real standing in the Church, and although the barbarism *catholicismus* occasionally slips into official documents, we only know of an *ecclesia catholica* or a *fides catholica.*

And why leave the noble term "Christianity" or "Christian" to marginal groups if not to anti-Semitic conventicles? "Right" or "Left" (I am thinking of authors like Ibach or Dirks), we over here are in rebellion against the narrowing label *Katholizismus* which, after all, implies a mere "ism" (and calls for "Catholicists" rather than "Catholics"), whereas "Catholic" stands for the universal form and creed of Christianity as against the local deviations. Yet to make an "ism" out of a mere delimination smacks of sectarianism, the Counter-Reformation, and the Ghetto. For similar though not identical reasons, the term Protestantism is more and more in disfavor on the Continent.

ERIK VON KUEHNELT-LEDDIHN.

FAMILY ALLOWANCE

La Crescenta, Cal.

TO the Editors: In the article from *Ave Maria* which you quote in the August 19 Commonweal, John J. Kane unfortunately creates the impression that he's equating deductible income with actual tax saving. Nowhere does he refer to the amount of tax that would be paid without the exemption in question; everywhere he speaks only of the amount of exempt income—which if *not* exempt would be merely the base for computing the tax.

For example, he cites a man with $5,000 annual income, and five children, as receiving "a total exemption of $54,000" for them. This would seem to be a simple matter of 5 (children) x 600 (dollars) x 18 (years). But this figure is irrelevant, especially for comparison with the $81,685 that Mr. Kane estimates as the cost of rearing the children. The relevant figure is the $11,808 of actual tax paid over 18 years by a childless couple with the same income, minus the $1008 of actual tax paid by the parents of five children (based on 1954 rates of $656 and $56, respectively).

The remainder—$10,800—is all that can be regarded as government subsidy through tax exemption. That's the figure to compare with the $81,685 cost of rearing the children. (And as the father of six, I now feel like the clock that was told it would have to tick 123,456,789 times in the coming year. It burst its mainspring and never ran again.)

LEON LUKASZEWSKI.

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The Poetry of Wallace Stevens

MARIUS BEWLEY

ONE takes pleasure in reflecting that Wallace Stevens received, during the year or two before his death last month at the age of seventy-five, some of the visible honors that should have been accorded to one of the greatest of all American poets. But it is not a matter for complacency. The obituary in the New York *Times* was at such a loss for words that it could only reprint a more than usually unfortunate review of *Harmonium* by the poetry editor that had appeared in the pages of the *New York Times Book Review* many years before. One should not mistake recognition for comprehension. And yet the difficulty of Stevens' verse is of a kind that will leave readers of poetry a century hence (if any readers of poetry are left in the smug interplanetary future) wondering where the difficulty was. "Is the man sane who can deliberately commit to print this fantastic nonsense?" a writer in *The North American Review* asked when Emerson published his volume of poems in 1847. "Who now reads Emerson?" one may ask; but for those who do, unintelligibility, or even difficulty, will not be found among the dominant characteristics of his poetry.

Great poets are not required to have new meanings any more than the seasons are. What they contribute is life, and a sense of organic relation between ourselves and the world. There is nothing new in what Wallace Stevens had to say; and yet in another sense it is all new, immersed in a vision, an originality, as new as morning. I think it is possible to gain a fresh insight into Stevens' poetry by considering him as an American Transcendentalist poet. There are some serious difficulties in the way, but there are also some rewards. For one thing, viewed in this way, he is no

Mr. Bewley, author of *The Complex Fate*, is a member of the faculty of the Catholic University of America.

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longer a sport in the American tradition, a rather dandified anomaly, but an explicable phenomenon.

TRADITIONAL American Transcendentalism is hard to define. But if it stood for anything as a movement, it was for the capacity to apotheosize the soiled pragmatic world, to justify the grubby fact, in a higher realm of intuition. Such a transcending process is essentially a motion, a becoming. But it is not necessarily a flight from material reality. It can be an intenser apprehension of life, conceived of as a kind of spiritual metabolism by which the boundaries of the physical are canceled, its substance becoming a part of some ultimate, central vision that is the highest life. For Stevens the exercise of the creative vision was the means toward achieving this intenser state of being. He never submitted this state to dogmatic definition, but he celebrated it in a great many poems.

Part I of Stevens' late poem, "Prologues to What Is Possible," is representative in this respect:

There was an ease of mind that was like being alone in
a boat at sea,
A boat carried forward by waves resembling the bright
backs of rowers,
Gripping their oars, as if they were sure of the way
to their destination,
Bending over and pulling themselves erect on the
wooden handles,
Wet with water and sparkling in the one-ness of their
motion.

The boat was built of stones that had lost their weight
and being no longer heavy
Had left in them only a brilliance, of unaccustomed
origin,
So that he stood up in the boat leaning and looking
before him
Did not pass like someone voyaging out of and beyond
the familiar.

He belonged to the far-foreign departure of his vessel
and was part of it,
Part of the speculum of fire on its prow, its symbol,
whatever it was,
Part of the glass-like sides on which it glides over the
salt-stained water,
As he traveled alone, like a man lured on by a syllable
without any meaning,
A syllable of which he felt, with an appointed sureness,
That it contained the meaning into which he wanted to
enter,
A meaning which, as he entered it, would shatter the
boat and leave the oarsmen quiet
As at a point of central arrival, an instant moment,
much or little,
Removed from any shore, from any man or woman,
and needing none.

These lines are quite as capable as passages in Eliot's *Quartets* of taking a Christian interpretation. They

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acquire a certain beauty in such a reading, and it has its own validity. But it is dangerous to put Stevens' poetry in a specifically religious frame. It belongs rather to a realm in which spiritual aspiration and psychological process, fusing together, become an end in themselves. There is a mystical element in that state of being "where," as Stevens puts it in another poem, "he would be complete in an unexplained completion."

In a published lecture Stevens has written: "The imagination is the power of the mind over the possibilities of things; but if this constitutes a certain single characteristic, it is the source not of a certain single value but of as many values as reside in the possibilities of things." This is a slippery formulation, but it should make it clear that if the imagination governs things, things detain the imagination (that is to say, the mind or soul) on too low a level to permit us to look with any confidence for anything beyond a natural explanation of the experience involved. But on another level, this relation between imagination and things which he has described explains the process by which he makes his poetry—the avenue of *things* down which his mind moves toward that centrality which, for him, is the end of the creative act, just as the creative act is the fulfillment of life. The last two stanzas of the poem from which I have already quoted illustrate Stevens' constant habit of metamorphosing nature and art into higher states of awareness or being:

What self, for example, did he contain that had not yet
been loosed,
Snarling in him for discovery as his attentions spread,
As if all his hereditary lights were suddenly increased
By an access of color, a new and unobserved, slight
dithering,
The smallest lamp, which added to its puissant flick,
to which he gave
A name and privilege over the ordinary of his common-
place—

A flick which added to what was real and its vocabulary,
The way some first thing coming into Northern trees
Adds to them the whole vocabulary of the South,
The way the earliest single light in the evening sky, in
spring,
Creates a fresh universe out of nothingness by adding
itself,
The way a look or a touch reveals its unexpected mag-
nitudes.

In many of Stevens' poems the creative mind climbs the ladder of things in this fashion toward some final, vibrant insight into, or possession of, being. Essentially, this process is psychological, but it is constantly on the point of tipping into mysticism. In his lecture, "Effects of Analogy," Stevens said that the poet "comes to feel that his imagination is not wholly his own, but that it may be a part of a much larger, much more potent imagination, which it is his affair to get at."

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ONE thinks of Emerson at once, but apparently Stevens did not like Emerson. One of his last poems is called "Looking Across the Fields and Watching the Birds Fly." If I read the poem correctly, Mr. Homburg is a witty and unkind epithet for Emerson, or at least for the popular conception of him, which Stevens shares:

Among the more irritating minor ideas
Of Mr. Homburg during his visits home
To Concord, at the edge of things, was this . . .

To think away the grass, the trees, the clouds . . .

The poem goes on to concern itself with the Over-Soul, defined as: ". . . mechanical/ And slightly detestable *operandum,* free/ From man's ghost, larger and yet a little like." It is "detestable" because it is remote from man. It is

Not one of the masculine myths we used to make
A transparency through which the swallow weaves,
Without any form or any sense of form,

What we know in what we see, what we feel in what
We hear, what we are, beyond mystic disputation,
In the tumult of integrations out of the sky . . .

But if this is Stevens' description of what Emerson's Over-Soul is not, it might serve equally well, with a minor cavil about the word "form," as Emerson's description of what it was to him. I imagine that Stevens would object that Emerson was insufficiently impressed by the physical world. Poem XV of "Esthetique du Mal" begins:

The greatest poverty is not to live
In a physical world . . .

And Stevens' poetry is filled with lines like these from "Crude Foyer":

Thought is a false happiness; the idea . . . .
That there lies at the end of thought
A foyer of the spirit in a landscape
Of the mind, in which we sit
And wear humanity's bleak crown.

But we already know that Stevens is not the rugged materialist such lines might imply. Verses such as these are really more typical and more central in his thought:

. . . It was a queen that made it seem
By the illustrious summer of her name

Her green mind made the world around her green.
The queen is an example . . . This green queen

In the seeming of the summer of her sun
By her own seeming made the summer change.

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This is typical Stevens, but the meaning, apart from technique, makes it also typical Emerson: "Poetry begins, or all becomes poetry, when we look from the center outward, and are using all as if the mind made it. That only can we see which we are, and which we make. The weaver sees gingham; the broker sees the stock-list; the politician, the ward and county votes; the poet sees the horizon. . . ."

There is no more insistence on "thought" and its transmuting power in Emerson than in Stevens, nor is Stevens enamored of the physical world more than Emerson: "These roses under my window make no reference to former roses or to better ones; they are for what they are; they exist with God today; there is no time to them. There is simply the rose; it is perfect in every moment of its existence. Before a leaf-bud has burst, its whole life acts; in the full-blown flower there is no more; in the leafless root there is no less. Its nature is satisfied and it satisfies nature in all moments alike. But man postpones or remembers; he does not live in the present, but with reverted eye laments the past, or heedless of the riches that surround him, stands on tiptoe to foresee the future. He cannot be happy and strong until he too lives with nature in the present, above time."

For Emerson as for Stevens, the world as it passed through the creative mind underwent perpetual metamorphosis which led, or ought to have led, into a more exalted spiritual state. As Emerson put it (and Stevens would not have dissented): "Thin or solid, everything is in flight . . . everything undressing and stealing away from its old into new form. . . ."

Both Stevens and Emerson described this inner illumination in terms that are either frankly or approximately mystical. But at this point certain differences begin to show. As I have already suggested, if we try to rationalize a metaphysic out of Stevens' poetry we have the sense of a man lifting himself by his bootstraps toward some kind of spiritual apotheosis normally beyond his capacity. The source of power remains a little puzzling, because Stevens will not confront the mystical element implicit in his idea or experience with the frankness Emerson employed with frequently irritating facility.

I quoted Stevens as saying that the poet's imagination "may be a part of a larger, much more potent imagination, which it is his affair to get at." The imagination when spoken of in these terms is very similar to Emerson's Over-Soul. Both terms are, of course, long on connotation and short on definition, so that it is difficult to compare them with precision. But it is clear that Stevens has not, except now and then, gone along with the implications of the statement just quoted. The Over-Soul may impress us as a crutch, but it is still a necessary support for the kind of inner illumination Emerson and Stevens wished to achieve.

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Yet, although this one difference is crucial enough to warrant our looking for an essential difference in the quality of their respective goals, if we reread the verses from "Prologues to the Possible" and compare them with Emerson's description of the talents of the soul, both poets seem to be dealing with the same thing: "The soul circumscribes all things. As I have said, it contradicts all experience. In like manner it abolishes time and space. The influence of the senses has in most men overpowered the mind to that degree that the walls of time and space have come to look real and insurmountable; and to speak with levity of these limits is, in the world, the sign of insanity. Yet time and space are but inverse measures of the force of the soul."

In Emerson the soul has this creative and destroying power, in some considerable degree, from the outside. It is able to transcend its usual limitations because it has superior assistance; but Stevens usually sheers away from this conclusion although it is really implicit in his poetry. A little ungenerously, he calls Emerson Mr. Homburg.

THE similarities of thought between Stevens and Emerson are not less real for being somewhat concealed, and they lead directly into similar conceptions of the role of the poet and the power of the word. Emerson was the second greatest poet that America produced in the nineteenth century. The compliment is modest enough. His ideas as they come to us both from his prose and his poetry were seminal. From William Carlos Williams' wistful cry in *Paterson,* "No ideas but in things," the symbolist faith in the ability of the word to incarnate reality stretches back across Whitman's *American Primer* to Emerson's *Nature.* For Emerson, Nature was the symbol through which God graphically expressed Himself to men, and conceptual symbolism, and hence language, was the means by which reality became intelligible to, and a possession of, the mind: "This relation between the mind and matter is not fancied by some poets, but stands in the will of God . . . . When in fortunate hours we ponder this miracle . . . the universe becomes transparent, and the light of higher laws than its own shines through." This miracle of metamorphosis and discovery could not be performed in dead language and symbol, but only by words and symbols as they are used by the creative mind making new forays into reality. Stevens has described this better than Emerson succeeded in doing in his own poems:

There it was, word for word,
The poem that took the place of a mountain.

He breathed its oxygen,
Even when the book lay turned in the dust of his table.

It reminded him of how he had needed
A place to go in his own direction,

How he had recomposed the pines,
Shifted the rocks and picked his way among the clouds,

For the outlook that would be right,
Where he could be complete in an unexplained completion.

My remarks here concerning the shortcomings of Stevens' metaphysics when one attempts to rationalize a metaphysic out of his poetry are not to be construed as a criticism of that poetry. Poetry is not metaphysics and Stevens remains, in my opinion, the greatest of all American poets, after Eliot. I doubt if Stevens would have welcomed the comparison with Emerson I have made here, but despite differences in outlook, the affinities I have pointed to (as well as the differences) seem to me to reveal a great deal about Stevens' poetry. Poetry is not metaphysics, but there is such a thing as a philosophical poet, and Stevens deserves this title. At a time when the "dandyism" of his verse is emphasized, the point is worth making. Dandyism is delightful, but if there were nothing under the flowered waistcoat would we pick up Wallace Stevens' *Collected Poems* as frequently as we do?

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The Preoccupations of a Christian Philosopher

THE DECLINE OF WISDOM. By Gabriel Marcel. Philosophical Library. $2.50.

By FREDERICK D. WILHELMSEN

GABRIEL Marcel has had more than one occasion to protest against those of his critics who sharply separate his philosophy from his social and political views. Some critics, apparently, thought it preposterous that the most advanced existentialist Christian thinker could really hold that the only alternative to a Communist or a Fascist regime in France was "a monarchical system, in accordance with the oldest traditions of our country, but of which the very idea, it must be admitted, is inconceivable to most Frenchmen today." Marcel's admitted preference for the older sanities of the European countryside, his suspicion of technological progress, his friendship for Gustav Thibon (that most intransigent of peasant philosophers), his hesitancies before the program of Christian democracy usually associated with the name of Jacques Maritain — all these things inclined professional scholars and academicians to isolate Marcel the metaphysician from Marcel the social critic.

By now it is clear that the isolation exists only in the minds of the critics who make it. Marcel's whole philosophical outlook, "that which I would prefer not to call my philosophy," is an analogous unity and must be treated as such.

Marcel's judgments on the social order issue from his sense of being: unless man returns to being he cannot recapture that fidelity to his own existence and to the world which is the source of honor and the sister of hope. Unless man breaks through the world of abstract thought fashioned for the sake of mastering experience, he remains withdrawn from the springs of piety and the roots of reality. But a world increasingly given over to technological thought — in the name of a spurious "logic of history"—is a world increasingly removed from the order of God's creation. Careful to distinguish between a right and a wrong use of scientific instruments, Marcel—and this is typical of his thinking—is primarily concerned with the danger of turning man and the world into a system of means and a field of objects: this danger is intrinsic, according to Marcel, to the kind of thinking that goes on in the mind of the technologist and scientist.

This preoccupation runs through *The Decline of Wisdom*, a collection of three essays, one of which was previously published in English. In "The Limitations of Industrial Civilization," Marcel traces the concrete effects of mass industrializa-

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tion on society. He concludes that the very idea of an "industrial civilization" (an idea, incidentally, highly comfortable to the *Life-Time-Fortune* mentality) is at odds with everything man has hitherto considered intrinsic to a civilized order: the agglomeration of thick masses of men living rootless lives under the shadow of the machine and the omnipresent power of the modern state has nothing in common with that ordered and analogous decorum, that sane privacy, which is one with a true civilized polity. A civilization using technics is one thing; a technologized civilization is a contradiction.

Marcel is deeply worried about the decline of the very idea, as well as the reality, of a "spiritual heritage." A society that constantly rips up its own countryside, tears down every memorial of its own past, forever wearily surrenders the good of man to the good of technological progress, is a community that has lost the sense of gratitude and dedication. A spiritual heritage is not something that endures over the ages; a spiritual heritage is a history that is a memory. Without it, man is simply thrown into existence, into the chaotic and senseless hell that is the world of Sartre. Such a man has nothing to hand on: he has no one to thank. We might say that he must, quite literally, carve out his own essence. If the older France enters the philosophy of Marcel, and receives there its most delicate metaphysical justification, the new world has found its apostle in the pages of Sartre.

The final essay—"The Breaking Up of the Notion of Wisdom"—might well repay a close reading by those Catholic thinkers engaged today in the task of reforming our educational system. Wisdom, for Marcel, includes not only the wisdom of philosophy and the wisdom which is supernatural: it includes that heritage from the Latins, which saw wisdom as "a sort of meeting ground for the sacred and the profane." Wisdom englobes, and is watered by, a reverence for being and a sense of community with the past. Wisdom is the father of freedom.

Marcel has said these things before. Some of them were said with greater precision in his earlier *Man Against Mass Society*. Marcel will write of them again. But all his meditations on the social order are haunted by a tragic mystery: a philosopher who sternly faces the decline of the Western world has the duty to warn mankind. But a philosopher, says Marcel, usually becomes ridiculous when he takes to signing manifestos, joining benevolent societies, and engaging concretely in the details of political decision. By his isolation, therefore, the philosopher finds himself largely cut away from the world he would warn. He confronts a populace debased by an educational system and a propaganda machine bent on mediocrity: the people he would help cannot understand him. Political and social action means entering into organizations which demand that the philosopher cease being a philosopher. His own integrity prevents his turning to the Left or to the Right, as those terms are usually understood today. As a result he remains fixed in his own isolation. By a heavy irony that is one with the age, the philosopher's very concern for the social order prevents his full engagement within it.

Marcel only hints at the problem. He certainly offers no solution. After all, only Americans believe there is an answer to every problem.

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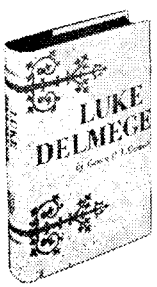

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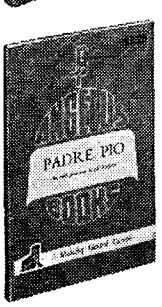

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Gunnar Kumlien's moving and thought-provoking articles in The Commonweal have won him a wide audience in this country, and assure him a warm welcome when he arrives this fall for his long planned first lecture tour of the United States.

Mr. Kumlien is a Swedish newspaperman who has lived half his life in Rome. He speaks fluently and writes for publication in half a dozen languages. Mr. Kumlien reports on the Mediterranean area and the Middle East for one of Stockholm's two big daily newspapers and for newspapers in Geneva and Western Germany, the London Tablet and the Swedish Broadcasting System—as well as for The Commonweal.

He is the author of a number of books on political, cultural and ethical subjects. One of these, which sets forth a Catholic view of sex, has aroused great interest in traditionally Protestant Sweden where, he says, interest in Waugh, Greene and Undset has provoked a lively concern for all things Catholic.

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hope to find the promise of emotional truth, of characterization confirmed. However, the human element here is the crucial deficiency, being saturated in a battery of secretive nature symbols. Half of the twenty-five pieces are set in a macabre vein against the "naturalistic" preoccupations of hunting and fishing. Of all, five alone have body, three being unqualified successes, and these are removed from field and stream; beside the deceptively wholesome backdrop of the others (the hunters are pretty disgruntled men) these un-selfconsciously eerie five produce an effect almost tonic.

As stylist the author resolutely churns his machinery, lashing his waves, driving his lowering skies, fixing the uneasy forest silence; as story-teller he galvanizes but lean atmosphere: seldom did the wide-open spaces seem emptier. The style, essentially decorative, is all surface play, a compulsive exercise in self-indulgent agility. The prose can be biting, oftener is sinuous, worried, the whole substance of a stunt sometimes resolving to a sophisticated solecism. Its foursquare descriptive vitality is therefore an ironic device to heighten the contrast of the freakish, and is ever glibly readying the punch-line.

This is style that encourages imagination to run herd; yet by that token it possesses its own effortless discipline which stylizes the imagination. It is a discipline hardly notable for integrity, since, of course, it isn't the sort of style a spontaneous imagination would choose of itself. It has everything needed for descriptive power, including a considerable technical range of taste; its one revealing poverty, a felt tone, appears strange until one realizes what the Irish-born, British educated writer acutely lacks is sensibility. If there is sensibility here, it is impersonal in a world of breathless seascapes and skeletons.

A live scene needs contraction; Mr. O'Brian's scenery overlaps embarrassingly; emptiness is its obtrusion. Scores of modern writers try to reproduce spiritual emptiness through perverse sensibilities; *The Walker* simply indicates an un-

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On the other hand "The Clockmender" is a startlingly original nightmare that doesn't have to solicit the pseudo-mystic to put over its shock; it is even enhanced by a rare force of subtlety. "The Voluntary Patient" is a smart fantasy-satire of auto-suggestive psychotherapy. "A Journey to Cannes," quite unlike anything else in the book, is a novel idea; for the fact that it concerns an episode in the waning years of painters Louis Durand and Kandinsky doesn't make it any less real as a story; it is the most authentic *story*, à la Maupassant, of all. It is the one corner of compassion, occupied by an off-manner *tableau vivant*. You know the sock-line must come, but here for once it is natural, not just inevitable.

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of Christ. It is the intent, therefore, of each of the ten authors writing in this volume to clarify and offer possible solutions to problems that stand between Christianity and modern civilization. Which of these writers best succeeds in this is a matter of personal preference. At the risk of being classed a colonial while reviewing the work of nine Englishmen and one American, I would recommend Father William Lynch's "Divisiveness in the United States" as the essay which best achieves the aims set forth by the editor.

Father Lynch, editor of the Fordham University quarterly, *Thought,* states the causes of our national split-personality as twofold: (1) the "mentality of the clear idea" which sets up an unnatural polarity of intellectual and popular cultures among us, threatening to divide the mind and body of society; and (2) the "univocal mind" that seeks to establish standards for the minimum man, stamping anything outside this least common denominator as alien, perhaps even subversive. This essay offers original and brilliant insights into some of our most basic national problems.

Though each of the other authors deals with problems encountered by the twentieth century Catholic in specific areas of life, David Jones in "An Enquiry Concerning the Arts of Man" somehow sums up a great deal left unsaid by the others. If I read Mr. Jones correctly, in his plea that Christian life needs art (taking this term in its broadest sense of human creativity) he is trying to tell us that contemporary civilization starves that part of man that is religious because it is artistic. One may or may not agree that this starvation is as great as Mr. Jones feels it is today, but one must admit the dangers to religion implicit in his argument. The Christian, he says, must find a means to exercise his natural artistic (therefore, sacramental) faculties in order to strengthen his participation in the Sacramental life of the Church, in spite of overwhelming pressures that urge him not to bother even trying. "Were this alienation [between man and his artistic nature]

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to become more complete," he warns, "then the persons affected would have to regard the postulate of the Church with respect to Sacraments as something to be accepted on authority only, something which the rules happened to say must be done."

It is not surprising that Catholics living in England, where the slightest expression of "Romanism" has been looked on as suspiciously alien, should tend to rejustify the religious teachings they already accept. Indeed one wonders whether it would be a good thing if they did not, for it seems to be such re-examination that is the source of much of the Church's strength in England. For the purposes of this book, however, it would have been better if all had followed the editor's advice, that not the essentials of Catholic teaching but rather their implementation be debated. In places the failure to do so amounts to an annoying distraction. Eric Strauss, for instance, dealing with a weighty theme, "The Church and Sex," sets up his arguments in the form of a cocktail hour discussion between a rather stereotypical agnostic and a somewhat patronizing Catholic layman friend. Deep in apologetics, Doctor Strauss fails to get into the matter at hand, that of discovering Catholic approaches to modern *dilemmas*.

Commendable among the other essays are Archbishop David Mathew's "Approach to Africa," "The Catholic in Politics" by Frank Pakenham, member of the former Labor Government in England; and Father Martin D'Arcy's consideration of "The Mystery of Evil." The rest include "The Uncommitted Mind" by Douglas Woodruff, "Physics and Philosophy" by G. Temple, "Marriage and the Family" by Elizabeth Pakenham (editor) and "Problems of Education and Upbringing" by Nicolete Gray. In spite of real shortcomings, this anthology provides a thoughtful approach to these issues.

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By SERGE HUGHES

THERE is a general agreement that biographies constructed from a detailed knowledge of life and works, whatever their shortcomings, are always of some value. At worst, they are a source of fascinatingly pointless erudition; at best, they uncover a buried world that by some miracle has never ceased to live.

And so, for quite a long time now, the world of letters, the casual reader, and the academic world as well have continued to welcome, in spite of sporadic strictures, all biographies conceived in such a serviceable, time-tested mold.

Mme. Vallentin stands out among contemporary biographers for the relish with which she approaches this medium. Restless with dreams of the Renaissance as some nineteenth century historians conceived it, she has one after the other broken every chain that has bound her less bold colleagues within the petty confines of specialization. Einstein, H. G. Wells, Goya, Mirabeau, Leonardo da Vinci, Stresemann and Heinrich Heine have paused on feeling the gaze of Mme. Vallentin light up their shades, glad that a gentle and understanding hand could brush away the dust that was beginning to settle on them.

Today El Greco, too, can rejoice. Still chafing at those who, at the turn of the century, were convinced that there was nothing wrong with Theotocopuli that a good oculist couldn't fix, exasperated by contemporaries who identify his heroes with the mental patients he presumably visited, the bristling spirit of El Greco is placated, for on the horizon a new champion has arisen.

Maintaining a sensible balance between the artist and the man, Mme. Vallentin's warm reconstruction deftly avoids all excessive concern with El Greco's paintings. They occupy a place, too: their proper place. For when Mme. Vallentin analyzes a painting, it is all neatly done in a brisk, professional

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way. She knows Wolfflin, she has read Panofsky, she has looked at many paintings of El Greco. Speaking of lines, grouping and balance, she shows that mark of the connoisseur, self-possession, is never trapped into an outburst of telling enthusiasm, and with no traces of false modesty reveals to the artist the significance of what he has done. Methodically, she strips layer after layer of meaning in a painting with the alert intentness of a bride preparing for the first time stuffed onions.

But it is boring to limit oneself to the art of an artist, especially if the reproductions of the paintings discussed are not in full color. Happily, on the word of those who knew him, El Greco was more than an artist. He was a mystic, a philosopher, a gifted conversationalist. An intimate friend of famous literary people: Gongora dedicated a poem to him. Then, since the what-might-have-been also has its undeniable place in history, what, muses Mme. Vallentin, if he had known Cervantes! It is an indication of the author's scrupulous respect for historical accuracy that she does not record the imaginary conversations.

Mme. Vallentin knows, however, that life is not all exultation: El Greco was never married to that woman. He had a bitterly disappointing son. And even as you and I, he had the rent to pay.

As the bibliography in this work shows, many have written on El Greco. Yet few biographies will reach as wide an audience. Here is all of El Greco. All of the history of the time. Now the strange shadows that obscured the features of Domenico Theotocopuli have cleared away.

REVIEWERS

Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, author of *Hilaire Belloc: No Alienated Man*, is a member of the philosophy faculty at Santa Clara.

William Dunlea is a frequent contributor to The Commonweal.

Frank Griffin, a freelance writer who lives in New York, has written for several Catholic publications.

Serge Hughes is a member of the faculty of St. John's University in Brooklyn.

The Story of DEMETRA *and the headless doll . . .*

DEMETRA is a lively, mischievous 15 month old baby with light brown hair and a face always scrubbed shiny and clean. She toddles around on the floors, generally gets in her mother's way, and gurgles over her doll.

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Demetra's mother has sold most of the family's possessions, even her own winter jacket, to buy milk and bread for the baby. Demetra's father, a newspaperman before the war, has been unable to find employment. He is hardworking and conscientious, but in poverty-stricken Greece there is little opportunity to earn a living wage. In a country where tragedy and sorrow walk hand in hand, Demetra's parents can only pray that someone—somewhere—will help their tiny daughter.

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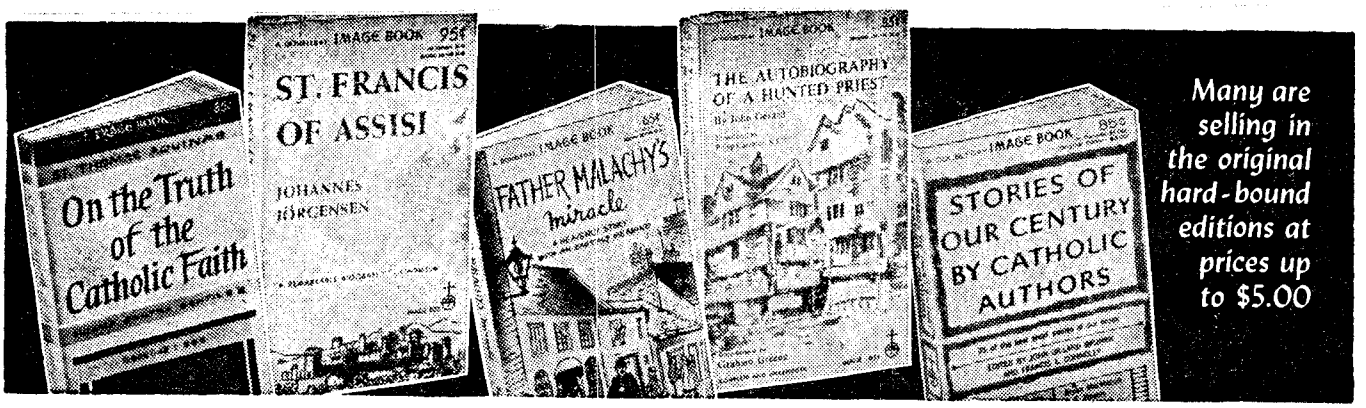
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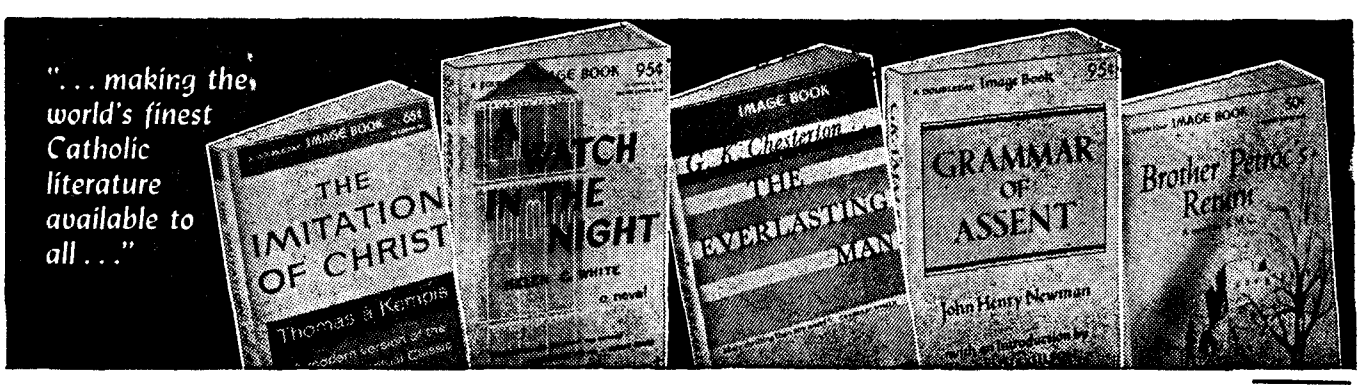
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